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## Rethinking Japan in Mainstream International Relations

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## Introduction

In terms of wealth, power, and modernity, Japan has been one of the major powers in the world since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it occupies a strangely curious position within the historical and theoretical accounts of the international system offered not only by the approaches to International Relations (IR) dominant in the West, but also by non-Western, and postcolonial approaches. Even the term ‘non-Western’ presupposes a problematic binary that associates mainstream to Western, which leaves Japan sometimes in, and sometimes out. For postcolonial IR, Japan does not fit easily into the perpetrator/victim binaries of either colonialism or racism. For mainstream IR it does not fit comfortably into its generally Eurocentric accounts, whether these be defined by modernity; or by a core-periphery global structure of wealth, power, and/or ‘civilization’; or by a polarity structure; or by the social structure of a mainly Western formed international society. Rethinking Japan in IR thus contributes to rethinking the interrelated pairings of binaries and identity politics, such as white imperialist/nonwhite colonized that permeate not just postcolonialism but mainstream IR more broadly.<sup>1</sup> Since the critical and mainstream stories do not mesh well, we focus in this article on Japan in mainstream IR, saving the critical and non-Western stories for later.

The mainstream IR story of Japan starts from the puzzle of how to fit an early-rising Asian country into the generally Eurocentric accounts of modernity. Japan is usually placed as an outsider to the Western core of modernity, leaving it as an odd exception to a ‘backward’, ‘stagnant’ Asia, despite the fact that it uniquely prefigured the rise of the rest by a century. Japan’s groundbreaking defeat of Russia in 1904-5, acknowledged as a major event at the time, now hardly registers in IR’s

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<sup>1</sup> Realism and liberalism (all versions), and (mainly Wendtian) constructivism, are conventionally viewed as the ‘big three’ of IR theory, certainly in the US, where neorealism and neoliberalism have largely merged in a ‘neo-neo’ synthesis. These big three are also significantly dominant in Europe, and wherever American approaches to IR have been influential. Some, including us, would include International Political Economy (IPE), with its significant Marxian content, and the English School, in the group of dominant approaches. We refer to these collectively as ‘mainstream’ approaches, mainly attempting to explain international relations. We differentiate them from more critical approaches to IR including poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism. To the extent that Japan’s story is told in IR, it is mainly told in the framings of these five mainstream approaches. On this, and on the problematic West/non-West distinction, see the special issue of *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7:3 (2007) on ‘Why is there no non-Western IR theory?’, the follow-on paper in 17:3 (2017) 341-70, and Acharya and Buzan, 2010, 229-33.

otherwise war-obsessed set of benchmark dates (Buzan and Lawson, 2014a). Its brief bid for imperial hegemony over Asia during the 1930s and 40s registers as a flash, unpleasantly associated with the aggressive fascist bid for world power. And then Japan largely disappears from view in IR. Only those who specialise in IPE or East Asia note its economic resurgence during the Cold War. As a 'civilian power' it largely drops out of realist polarity theory, not only for its lack of military power, and its constitution's Article 9 renouncing the use of force to resolve international disputes, but also for its security dependence on the US. Japan is somehow always the unique exception that doesn't fit neatly into the Eurocentric and mainly realist way that IR tells its stories about the last 150 years.

This year marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Japan's Meiji Restoration/Revolution which many mark as the beginning of Japan's turn to the West, and destabilizing of the West-non-West binary. The aim of this paper is to overthrow the mythologies of both uniqueness and misplacement of Japan.<sup>2</sup> In doing so it exposes the distortions imposed on how Japan is understood not only by being viewed through the lens of Eurocentrism, but also by being viewed through the lenses of mainstream IR theories, particularly realism. Eurocentrism implies relationships among race, imperialism, and development, that continue to contour the lines of debate in both IR and contemporary global politics. Realism imposes military-heavy understandings of power that sometimes fit Japan's case, and sometimes result in occlusion. We pursue this aim by retelling in chronological sequence four stories of modern Japan in international relations.<sup>3</sup> The aim of these stories is to show the limits of mainstream IR story-telling by stripping away the distortions of Eurocentrism and realism, and showing how Japan's impact on modern international relations has been wider and deeper than is generally acknowledged.

- First, Japan was part of the group of early modernizing countries, and this undoes the Eurocentric link between white/West and modernity.

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<sup>2</sup> A significant caveat to our claim against uniqueness is that we deal only with Japan and make no attempt to propose a general framework applicable to other countries. Japan is often compared with Germany on the grounds of both being defeated great powers. This is valid, but superficial, and applies only post-1945. Japan's story is affected by Eurocentrism in a way that Germany's is not, involving race and non-Western culture.

<sup>3</sup> These stories fall roughly into standard periodizations of IR: 19<sup>th</sup> century, interwar years, and post-1945. Each focuses on a particular neglected or distorted theme within that period. While there is considerable discontinuity in the military theme emphasized by realism, there is much more continuity in terms of economics and development.

This initial misplacement of Japan underpins the subsequent distortions in how mainstream IR tells its story.

- Second, as the local core of modernity, Japan played a very significant role in Northeast Asia's development up to 1945. Because development in East Asia is tightly associated with state legitimacy, Japan's role in it is a difficult issue both for its former colonies and for the West.
- Third, from 1902-1945, Japan played a full global role as a great power, and made a large and lasting impact on world history and politics.
- Fourth, once it had recovered from the devastation of the Second World War, Japan quickly picked up its key role as the modernizing core for East Asia. It did this in complicity with, and subordination to, the US, in the process providing a vital economic and ideological foundation for the successful US claim to global superpower status.

The penultimate section discusses how our repositioning of Japan plays into the situation as we move into a post-Western and post-East Asian World Order where China and others are at last finding their own paths to modernity. The conclusions consider what explains Japan's misplacement, and often marginalization, in IR.

### Japan in the Context of Emerging Modernity

How does Japan fit into the process of modernity that took off during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The way this story is told (or not told) is heavily influenced by Eurocentrism, and except as it relates to Japan's military development is marginalized by realism. Japan is usually placed as the one non-white/Western country that somehow modernized a century before any other non-white/Western state, and became recognized as a great power by other leading states. It does not fit the broader story about an Asia of stagnant agrarian states either being colonized by Western powers (South and Southeast Asia) or having violent, sustained, and unequal encounters with them from a position of weakness (China). China and Japan started in similar positions, but quickly and sharply diverged (Gray, 2002: vii). Neither does it fit within the Western story, which likes to see the decisive emergence of a stable modernity as something that happened in (white) Western Europe and North America. A constant question is whether Japan is part of the East or part of the West, reflected in Japanese slogans such as *wakon yosai* (Japanese spirit western technology) or Yukichi Fukuzawa's often misinterpreted essay on 'leaving Asia' to join the West. Japan's relation to modernity, we argue, productively refuses a binary, West/non-West, mainstream account of both development and world history. Critics of Eurocentrism in IR also have a vexed relationship with Japan: while its

defeat of Russia was a cause to celebrate the agency of a non-white/Western power, this narrative then often leaves out Japan because it joins the club of colonial great powers. Its early modernization is potentially a major threat to the whole West-centric story of modernity, and also thereby to Eurocentric *and* anti-Eurocentric accounts of how the modern international system unfolded.

To discuss the history of Japan without succumbing to the historical development narrative that naturalizes Eurocentric modernity, we juxtapose Landes' (1969) and Rosenberg's (2010, 2013, 2016) theories of development. Landes' (1969: 39, 124-6, chs. 3 and 4) argument represents the mainstream view of modernity that Britain was the only case of sustained 'self-generated' industrial modernity, and that all other cases are necessarily versions of 'emulative response' (e.g. Pomeranz, 2000). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain's rising wealth and power was both an opportunity for, and a threat to, other powers. They faced intense pressure to copy the British model, but found it extremely difficult to adapt its complex social, economic and political features to their own limitations and advantages.

Rosenberg's argument concerns uneven and combined development (UCD). It posits three drivers lying behind the universality of uneven development: first, the diversity of geographical and resource endowments; second, the physical separation of political units (IR theory's familiar anarchic structure); and third, the differential impact of 'combination'. 'Combination' means the ways in which social orders trade, coerce, emulate, borrow and steal from each other, and, like unevenness, can vary greatly in degree. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, geography facilitated combination where there were available sea and river routes, but mountains, deserts, long distances, and harsh climates obstructed it. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, combination has been massively and permanently facilitated by industrial technologies that overcame geographical constraints: steamships, railways, highways, aircraft, spacecraft, the telegraph and the internet (see also Baldwin, 2016). Combination therefore increases directly with the third element of UCD: 'development', which for our purposes is broadly synonymous with modernization. In Rosenberg's formula, a new social configuration spreads outward from its point or points of origin, and has varied effects depending on both the timing of its arrival, and the local conditions of the cultures it impacts.

Landes' and Rosenberg's analyses fit together nicely. The starting point for the new configuration was Britain, whose industrial modernization was, by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, creating both extreme unevenness of

development, and a rapidly accelerating level of combination. Britain's industrial modernity opened up what today is seen as a spectrum of developed and underdeveloped economies defined in terms of an ever-advancing standard of modernity. The ideas, institutions and products of modernity flowed out of Britain on a global scale, carried by both coercion and commerce. They forced other countries and peoples to adapt or resist as best they could. As Bairoch (1982: 272) makes clear, responding was not easy: the revolutionary changes towards industrial modernity that began in Britain 'took over half a century to be initiated and copied elsewhere', even amongst the small group of successful early responders. Some countries and cultures adapted to it with varying degrees of success. Some collapsed. Many were subordinated by the huge power gap that opened up between the handful of successful early modernizers and all the others, what Pomeranz (2000) called 'the great divergence'. Where does Japan fit into this picture of the first round of a globally spreading modernity?

That Japan was a member of the quite small core group of countries that achieved durable industrial modernity before the First World War is clear from the statistics, though the placement of Japan troubles some economic historians. Bairoch (1982: 288) excludes Japan from both the developed country group and the underdeveloped group. In his millennial perspective on global development, Maddison (2001) does eventually include it in his 'Group A' of developed states, along with Western Europe, the US and the white commonwealth countries. His 'Group B' is the third world in Africa, Asia and Latin America, none of which achieved durable industrial modernity until a century later when the Asian tigers led the way, followed by China. Maddison's, and Baldwin's (2016) placement of Japan acknowledges that it was part of the handful of countries that responded successfully and early to the British challenge, achieving durable modernity before 1914. The data therefore show that Japan is located in 'Group A' rather than 'Group B'.

Geographically, Japan had the disadvantage of being almost as far from the British point of origin of industrial modernity as it was possible to get. Western and Northern Europe, the US, and Russia, were either close to Britain, and/or strongly connected to it by commerce, immigration and war. By contrast, Japan was on the end of a long and tenuous trading route, and under the Tokugawa Shogunate had, except for a small window in Nagasaki where Dutch-Japan relations informed the Japanese worldview, insulated itself for more than two centuries from trade and cultural contact with the West, though remaining open to trade and cultural contact with China and Korea (Jansen, 2000: ch. 3; Toby, 1991; Hamashita, 2003). When Commodore Perry's gunboat diplomacy

'opened' Japan in 1853, it began an encounter with both the West and modernity that was later, and therefore more intense, than for the other members of the successful first responder group.

But the disadvantage of distance was also an advantage. Japan was shielded from colonization both by its remoteness, and by the greater interest of the Western powers in the riches of China. After the 1857 uprising in India, Britain was disinclined to pay the cost of direct rule, and the US was more interested in 'open doors' than in colonial rule. As with China (Gray, 2002: 101-3, 118-23; Darwin, 2007: 353), the Western powers preferred to use unequal treaties to extract profit from Japan (Duus, 1998). Furthermore, the Japanese elites were prompted to take modernization seriously by the British defeat of Qing China in the Opium War. Upon hearing of the British victory, samurai scholar Shozan Sakuma noted that the era of the kingly way was over, now is the era of might (Matsuda, 2002: 7).

The standard picture of the rise and spread of industrial modernity has Britain remaining dominant until at least 1860. The most successful early imitators were Switzerland, Belgium, France and the US, and by the 1870s, Germany and the US were catching up (Bairoch, 1982: 272, 290-91). Although starting late, Japan was part of a third group of first round modernizers along with Russia, Italy, Spain, and Austria-Hungary (Bairoch, 1981: 10; Bairoch, 1982, 294-95). This core, along with the white commonwealth and some smaller European countries, together comprise the first general round of industrial modernization. For the century following 1870, the game of competitive modernity was largely played within this set. The second general round did not begin until the rise of the East Asian Tigers during the 1970s, reinforcing Bairoch's point that emulation was not easy.<sup>4</sup> Like the first responders to Britain, the second-round responders of the third world took half-a-century to catch up with the first round modernizers.

Domestic factors also matter. Unlike most other non-Western countries, and some Western ones, most notably in Eastern Europe and Iberia, Japan had relatively favourable domestic conditions to facilitate its transformation. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before industrial modernity had made a big impact, Japan's life expectancy, increase in per capita income growth, and GDP per capita were comparable to levels in Western Europe (Maddison, 2001: 27, 38, 46). It had a well-developed commercial economy, and its class structure, demography and land

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<sup>4</sup> Bairoch was talking about the difficulties for countries that were not colonized by, but in competition with early modernizers. Additional obstacles confronted those who were colonized, though as we show below there were some exceptions to this.



ownership were all favourable for modernization (Curtin, 2000: 156-71; Pomeranz, 2000; Totman, 2005: locs. 8028-56; Allinson and Anievas, 2010: 479-85). Unlike China, where foreign pressure further weakened the dynasty, the Meiji reformers in Japan created a stabilizing, though flawed, fusion of tradition (the emperor and Shinto) and modernity (Gluck, 1985). They quickly put in place a modern nation-state that could cultivate nationalism, pursue industrialization, and resist foreign takeover (Jansen, 2000, chs. 11-12; Totman, 2005: locs. 8198-8429). In 1871, Japan sent the Iwakura Mission to observe how things were done in Western countries, and hired experts from abroad to help with all aspects of modernization. Yukichi Fukuzawa in 1872 noted how science and technology is a recent development in the West also, therefore rendering the gap manageable (Fukuzawa, 2012; Jansen, 2000: locs. 5364-5438). Between 1870 and 1913 Japan broadly caught up with rates of growth in Western Europe for population, GDP and GDP/capita (Maddison, 2001: 126). Japan's GDP tripled, comparable to Germany and Russia, and better than Britain, France and Italy; and its GDP/capita doubled, slightly exceeding the rate in Western Europe (Maddison, 2001: 129, 206, 261, 264-5).<sup>5</sup> Between 1820 and 1913 Japan's share of the global GDP held fairly steady at around 3% as it kept pace with the industrializing leading edge. Life expectancy in Japan also rose during this period, as it did in the other core countries (Topik and Wells, 2012: 602-3; Osterhammel, 2014: 170-72).

Japan was a comparative late-starter on the run to modernity. Although comparable in size to most Western economies in 1820, by 1870 Japan's GDP was slightly more than half of Italy's and a third of Germany's, and about a quarter of that of Britain and the US. By 1913 it was still about a third of Britain's, Germany's and Russia's, but had nearly caught up with Italy (Maddison, 2007: 379). In terms of total manufacturing output, Japan ranked 8<sup>th</sup> by 1913, 20 percent of the British level and 17 percent of the German one (Bairoch, 1982: 284). The relative values of its merchandise exports 1870-1913 rose fast from 15-315, remaining much smaller than Germany and Britain, but comparable to Russia (216-783) (Maddison, 360-62). Japan's share of world manufacturing output is comparable to Italy's between 1870 and 1913. Japan overtook France in total industrial capacity during the 1930s (Bairoch, 1982: 301), but not until the 1960s did it catch up with the leading industrial powers in scale, surpassing the Soviet Union during the 1980s.

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<sup>5</sup> Similar social dynamics make it fairer to compare Japan to Western Europe. The US grew much faster because mass migration was expanding its population rapidly.

As the data show, Japan, despite being geographically non-Western and as far away as possible from Britain, became clearly part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century core of early modernizers. Japan reacted to the external pressure of the new configuration of modernity, and created domestic conditions conducive to the pursuit of modernity. It matched the later modernizers within the first round, and left behind even those un- or de-colonized European countries that failed to respond effectively to the challenge of modernity. In line with UCD, Japan generated its own distinctive fusion of culture and modernity, which became the template for the Asian developmental state.<sup>6</sup>

### Japan as the Regional Core for Asian Modernity

Given its perceived cultural and geographical proximity, Meiji Japan quickly became both a model for other peripheral modernizers (Osterhammel, 2014: 560, 563), and was recognized as such by Chinese and Korean reformers (Gray, 2002: 216-19; Schell and Delury, 2013: loc. 801). Between 1870 and 1930 Japan gave considerable inspiration and assistance to Chinese modernizers. As Schell and Delury (2013: 147) note: 'This was the decade [before the 1914] when Chinese intellectual and political *avant garde* figures were all converging on their island neighbour to study the Meiji model'. Some came as students, others as political refugees, from both China and other parts of Asia. They included big names such as: Wang Jingwei (Mitter: 2013: loc. 679), Liang Qichao (Osterhammel, 2014: 786; Schell and Delury, 2013: 78, 99), Chen Duxiu (Schell and Delury, 2013: 142-7), Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen (Schell and Delury, 2013: 175) and Rash Behari Bose. Japan's successful revision of unequal treaties imposed by Western powers meant that foreign powers could not pursue such people within Japan. In the three decades before 1937 some 30,000 Chinese studied in Japan (Mitter, 2013: locs. 462, 658). Japan provided for China much of the language and conceptual structure for Asian modernity (Duara, 2015: 84-7). Much of China's military modernization, such as Yuan Shi-kai's Beiyang Army, was modelled on Japan, and both Sun Yat-sen and the northern warlords vied for Japanese support (Peattie, 2007: 174-7, 182).

The need for modernization advocated by these reformists became pitted against conservative factions within China and Korea who upheld traditional values and resisted modernization/Westernization. Unlike in Japan, this resistance was successful enough to render China and Korea ripe for external intervention. Both the Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War can be understood as the intersection of domestic

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<sup>6</sup> On the Asian developmental state see Beeson and Breslin, 2014.

desire for modernization in China and Korea, with Japan as the mediator, on the one hand, and the externally imposed modernization that was phrased in the language of the 'civilizing mission' with Japan as the colonizer, on the other. Fukuzawa's essay, 'Datsu-A Ron' [Leave Asia] published in 1885, penned immediately after the failed Gapsin Coup in Choseon Korea, argued that Japan must decisively disconnect from Korea and China because continued association with them risked the West lumping Japan with Asia as the stagnant Other. Fukuzawa, a liberal thinker, was therefore supportive of the Sino-Japanese War, since for him forced Enlightenment was better than refusal of modernity. In the name of civilizing mission, Japan therefore became a direct agent of modernization in Northeast Asia (Dudden 2006). It is in this sense that the line between serving as a model and imposing a model is both difficult to draw and politically charged. Ironically, while Japan became a model and intellectual hub for many Asians, the Japanese views of its Asian Others were sharply split. While some in Japan supported the Chinese and Korean modernizers, others did not (Jansen, 2000: locs. 7709-7790; Peattie, 2007: 174-7). Right from the beginning, Japan has been divided about how to relate to both its region and the Western powers.

The net result of this was that Japan contributed to the development of its neighbours, not only by offering inspiration, education, and sanctuary, but also by effectively imposing on its colonies, especially Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria, a version of its own Meiji reforms. At the outset, Japan undertook a 'civilizing mission' towards its 'underdeveloped' neighbours (Dudden, 2006). But this mode of colonial rule changed after the First World War. There was a surge of anti-colonial independence movements (May 4<sup>th</sup> movement in China, March 1<sup>st</sup> movement in Korea) within Japan's colonies and sphere of influence, inspired by Woodrow Wilson's support for self-determination. And the Japanese military learned the lesson that the next war had to be fought as a total war based on a sustainable and self-sufficient regional bloc that was geared to enhancing Japan's power. This continental strategy in turn created tension between the military and the Japanese state. It was in the spirit of collaborating with the US and British that Japanese political leaders agreed to the Naval reduction treaty. But perception in the military that the terms were unequal fed resentment, motivating its takeover of the civilian government (Paine, 2017: 77-108). Imperial development during the interwar period was about denying domestic anti-colonial movements in the name of pursuing Japanese and Asian regional autonomy on the one hand, and the geopolitical logic of creating a greater Japan, with a sufficient industrial and resource depth to defend itself and Asia from Western imperialism, on the other.

This culminated in the 'greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere' (GEACPS). In the event, despite, and because of, the term 'co' in the prosperity sphere, the GEACPS ended up being largely defined in terms of the harsh and exploitative practices of the Japanese empire. But some of the prior thinking behind it in Japan took 'co-prosperity' seriously, though with Japan as the leader, but with a much more communitarian and developmental intent on the regional scale (Williams, 2004: 30; Goto-Jones, 2005; Sakai, 2008: 241-8). As noted earlier, Japan's relation to its Asian neighbors oscillated between 'rising together' and 'leaving Asia' —it is in the spirit of the former that the logic of both denial of autonomy of other Asians and the creation of regional block intertwine. And this communitarian/cooperative intent differentiates Japan's imperial relations in terms of development. As Cumings (1984: 12-13) notes, before 1945 Japan was 'among the very few imperial powers to have located modern heavy industries in its colonies: steel, chemicals, hydroelectric facilities in Korea and Manchuria, and automobile production for a time in the latter.... By 1945 Korea had an industrial infrastructure that, although sharply skewed towards metropolitan interests, was among the best developed in the third world'. Kohli (2004: 25-61) shows in detail how Japanese colonial rule was far more penetrative and modernizing than British and French, reshaping Korean agriculture, transforming the class and political structures, abolishing slavery, and creating an export-orientated modern economy with a substantial industrial sector. Although this was a coercive, repressive, colonial state, it also laid the foundations of modernity, in the process co-opting substantial sections of Korean society (Tudor, 2012: 19).

As told by Duara (2003, see also Paine, 2017: 115-18) a somewhat similar story can be found in Manchuria except that in Manchukuo the Japanese tried to construct not so much a colony as an 'independent', if highly penetrated, nation-state (Duara, 2003: locs 116-23). Despite strenuous diplomatic efforts by Japan, this project failed to get international recognition, and despite some success in creating a national politics in Manchukuo, was eventually undermined by Japan's extractive wartime demands and discriminatory racism. Nevertheless, during the period of Japanese rule, Manchuria was substantially industrialized and modernized. It too had a version of the Meiji modernization model thrust forcibly on it, becoming a highly authoritarian and repressive developmental state. It is revealing that the large inward migration from China into Manchuria that had been going on since the 1890s continued apace during the Japanese occupation. While some Chinese resisted Japan's takeover, many others were drawn in by the

expanding economic opportunities and the chance to escape the chaos of China's failed state (Duara, 2003: 68). Koreans also played a significant role in Japan's colonization and modernization of Manchuria.

Taiwan likewise got significant infrastructure and industrial development. Japan treated Taiwan, like Korea, in many ways as part of itself, including extending to the population its own system of mass education (Gray, 2002: 456). Between 1910 and 1940, both Korea and Taiwan had higher average GDP growth than Japan's 3.36%. Korea's manufacturing capacity grew at 10% per annum (Cumings, 1984: 2). Albeit in self-interested fashion, Japan thus laid the social as well as the material foundations for the successful remodernizations of South Korea and Taiwan as Asian tigers after the Second World War. In doing so, however, it also left them with the dilemma of how to link their state legitimacy to that history. Japan's Manchurian venture had a different fate, with much of its industry stripped out by the invading Russians (Duara, 2003; Paine, 2012: locs. 5003-5039). Japan laid in its colonies the foundations for wealth and power while simultaneously compromising their culture and autonomy.

Against these developmental contributions to its neighbours, stands the monstrous damage that Japan inflicted not only on its colonies in the name of development, but also on China and its Asia-Pacific neighbours as a imperial power. The developmental state model was ruthlessly applied on internal (Hokkaido) and external colonies. Such behaviour leaves assessing the meaning of development in postcolonial societies in a difficult impasse: how does one judge ruthless development imposed by outsiders against ruthless development imposed by authoritarian regimes on their own people? Against China during its war of conquest between 1937 and 1945, the Japanese killed between 14-20 million Chinese (Mitter: 2013, locs. 283, 6734) and injured something like the same number. They wreaked huge destruction on the Chinese economy, leaving much of China's own industrial and infrastructure modernization during the 1920s and 30s in ruins (Mitter, 2013: loc. 283; Paine, 2012: locs. 4624-84). On top of this, Japan's invasion, and China's resistance to it, displaced as internal refugees perhaps 80-100 million people, 15-20 percent of China's population (Mitter, 2013: loc. 2222). This was a massive blow to China's development, and war damage was also widespread throughout Japan's sphere of control in the Asia-Pacific. In addition, there were the massacres of civilians, the use of POW for medical experiments, and the recruitment of women into military prostitution, all of which have fueled deep and bitter history problems between Japan and both China and Korea ('Impact of History', 2007-8; Tanaka, 2008; Togo, 2008a&b). What all this

underscores, is how treating the story of development strictly in terms of military and economic modernization desensitizes one to the politics of development. Japan's omission from, and inclusion in, various narratives of IR must be partly understood as a consequence of this broader tension over the meaning of development in IR.

### Japan as a Great Power from late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to 1945

Japan made it into the ranks of the recognized great powers partly by meeting the Western 'standard of civilization' (Gong, 1984), partly by building up an industrial economy and a modern army and navy, partly by participating in great power diplomacy, and partly by winning wars and making alliances with other great powers. This part of Japan's story fits well with realist criteria, and although its telling is tinged with Eurocentrism, is reasonably well represented in mainstream IR accounts of this period. But like its early contributions to Northeast Asian modernization, Japan's record as a normal great power of the time, is overshadowed by its aggressions during the 1930s and 40s. Yet for the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan was part of the great power club even though the 'standard of civilization' was certainly not color-blind. Despite its own embrace of imperialism, Japan made some significant contributions to anti-colonialism and anti-racism.

From the beginning, the Meiji leadership aimed to escape being colonized. They emulated the style and form of the great powers of the day, which was to modernize internally, and build an empire externally. Appropriating the Eurocentric language of international law against the Sinocentric tributary practices, Japan invaded Taiwan in 1874 (annexing it formally in 1895), fought wars for overseas territory with both China (1894-5) and Russia (1904-5), and annexed Korea (1910). Such reforms went hand in hand with efforts to achieve equal diplomatic and political status. Japan campaigned vigorously against unequal treaties – extraterritoriality was revoked in the late 1890s and tariff controls were removed in 1911 (Gong, 1984: 164-96; Howland, 2016). Japan worked hard to meet the 'standard of civilization' which appeared colour-blind both internally and externally. In both the 1894-5 war against China, and the 1904-5 one against Russia, the Japanese went out of their way to treat prisoners of war in a humane fashion, carefully following the international law of war to demonstrate its 'civilized' nature (Paine, 2003: 175, 209; Howland, 2016).

Japanese victory against China put Japan on the road to recognition as a great power, but it met a setback with the Triple Intervention by Russia, Germany and France afterwards, which took away some of its

gains in China. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 gave Japan great power recognition, and its defeat of Russia three years later both reinforced this status, and signaled new possibilities for the meaning and implication of being 'non-Western'. The global significance of Japan's victory is little recognized now, but was fully apparent at the time. Alfred Zimmern, a leading academic in British interwar IR, announced to his Oxford class that: 'I feel I must speak to you about the most important historical event that has happened, or is likely to happen, in our lifetime: the victory of a non-white people over a white people' (Vitalis, 2005: 168). This remark illustrates the importance of race during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It underlines how Japan's military victories broke the myth of invincible white power established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, giving inspiration, except for those subjugated by Japan, to anti-colonial movements around the world (Westad, 2007: 88-9). The 'awakening' prompted by Japan's defeat of Russia was realized in nationalist revolutions against 'backwardness' in Iran, China and the Ottoman empire, as well as in the resurgence of a 'pan-Asian' strand of thought whose leading voices, such as the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, commanded large audiences (Collins, 2011). The Young Turks sought to make the Ottoman state the 'Japan of the Near East', praising its assertiveness and fashioning of a distinctly 'Asian modernity' (Aydin, 2007: 78). The early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernizers around the emperor in Ethiopia were called *Japanizers* (Westad, 2007: 253).

Japan's rise to great power status also resulted in rendering more explicit the underlying issue of racism in international politics. As Shimazu (1998) argues, racial discrimination against Japan threatened Japan's standing as a great power by casting it as inferior to white powers and placing it alongside the non-white subjects of the colonies. This was rubbed in by anti-Japanese and anti-Asian immigration policies in the US, Canada and Australia, and by Woodrow Wilson's joining of Britain in rejecting the bid for the inclusion of racial equality clause proposed by Japan (Clark, 2007: 83-106). Though motivated by its own concern over discrimination against Japanese immigration, Japan confronted the white great powers with the issue of racism at the Versailles negotiations during 1919. Although this was not about racial equality as a *general* principle since Japan wanted equality for itself while it continued to discriminate against its Asian neighbours, Western discrimination against Japanese immigrants fueled the anti-Western turn in Japanese policy that laid the basis for geopolitical contestation during the inter-war years, thereby implicitly racializing the meaning of war.

The apparent contradiction of being both non-White and imperialist, must be understood in this light. The racial equality clause was vetoed

by the US and Britain, yet despite its failure to gain racial equality, Japan functioned as a normal member of the great power club. At the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-2 it won designation as the third-ranked naval power ahead of France and Italy. It seized Manchuria in 1931, which was already a semi-autonomous warlord state, and as noted made a colonial state there. It invaded China in 1937, but despite many military victories was unable to defeat China. It was badly defeated in a short border war against the Soviet Union in 1939, joined the Axis Alliance with Germany and Italy in 1940, made a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union in 1941, and opened war against Britain and the US in 1941 (Paine, 2012). It is notable how, once Japan declared war against the US and Britain, the right wing Kyoto School philosophers latched onto the prevalence of pan-Asianist sentiments in the world beyond Japan's immediate control by emphasizing as a central theme the breaking of 'white power' (Yonetani, 2006). In the run-up to the Second World War, Japan, like several other great powers, left the League of Nations. Ironically, its legitimation was anchored in the language of internationalism, in the name of bringing peace through an alternative regional bloc that rejected Anglo-American dominance (Abel, 2015). Because of IR's own forgetting of its origins (Vitalis, 2005), internationalism is generally posed as an antithesis to imperialism, thereby also rendering Japan's behavior an anomaly. By the standards of the day, Japan's military strength was impressive despite its economy still being less developed than those of the leading Western great powers. By 1941, for example, Japan's 'Zero' fighter, and its Type 93 'Long Lance' torpedoes, were superior to anything in the US arsenal, and it had built the world's biggest battleship (*Yamato*). Despite both its own colonialism, and eventually being defeated, Japan's early victories over the US, Britain, France and the Dutch during 1941-2 broke their colonial grip in Asia and significantly paved the way for the decolonization of the region (Paine, 2017: 175).

Japan's four-decade run as an imperial great power ended with the devastation of its cities and industry by the Allied Powers, and the near complete obliteration of its navy and merchant marine. The nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened a narrative of Japan as a victim rather than victimizer, thereby occluding its past as a great power and continually postponing Japan from facing its history problem with its neighbours. Nevertheless, as Paine (2017: 149-56, 185; 2012: locs. 4624-84, 5823) argues, Japan's run as an independent great power had two other major and enduring consequences for world politics. First, the failure of Japan and Germany to coordinate against the Soviet Union at the crucial moments, significantly affected the outcome of the war in Europe and thus all that followed. Second, by breaking the power and



legitimacy of the Nationalist government in China, Japan ensured the victory of the communists in the Chinese civil war, as Mao himself acknowledged (Jansen, 2000: loc. 10003; Gray, 2002: vii, 270).

### 1952-Present: A Pillar of the US-Led Capitalist World Order

After 1945, Japan disappeared from the ranks of the great powers and also from most of mainstream IR other than IPE, where its economic resurgence played significantly. In realist perspective, it was just a subordinate ally of the US, with this view supporting the maintenance of a Eurocentric view of world politics. The only exception to this sidelining was a brief period during the early and middle 1990s, when Japan's strong economic growth generated a fashion, especially in the US, for seeing it as the likely challenger for superpower status (Huntington 1991: 8; 1993; Layne: 1993: 42-3, 51; Spruyt 1998). With Japan's economic stagnation, this fashion faded quickly.

Although it is true that Japan has been both subordinate to the US, and militarily inert, it is untrue that it has been unimportant to the configuration and dynamics of wealth and power. The magnitude of Japan's power has increased markedly, with its GDP surpassing that of the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Its former role as a self-seeking imperial great power has morphed into serving as the key pillar supporting US superpowerdom in Asia (Inoguchi, 1986). There has been a great deal of continuity in its role as a model and hub for much of the development process in East Asia. Japan has been crucial both to the victory of the West in the Cold War, and to the more general triumph of capitalism over command economy that both won the Cold War and shaped the post-Cold War world.

In politico-military terms, by far the main significance of Japan in the configuration of world power since 1945 has been the essential role it plays in supporting the US as the only superpower, both during the Cold War and after. This supportive role is only partly about Japan's provision of bases, and its role in containment. The US is certainly still the leading world power in material terms, but equally important is its social position, which is often marginalized in the materialist perspective of realism. The real key to US superpower status is that the next two biggest centres of capital and technology in the international system, Europe and Japan, subordinated themselves within US-dominated alliances (Nye, 2002). The US thus both cemented a democratic/capitalist ideological consensus on the basic principles of the world economy, and prevented serious great power coalition forming against it (Layne, 1993: 5-7). The US is a superpower not just because of its material capability, but also

because of its institutionalized and consensual partnerships with the EU and Japan. The endurance of such partnerships, despite the drift towards unilateralism in US policy that surfaced during the Bush administration (2001-8), and has resurfaced in Trump's 'America first' policy, is a testimony to its strength.

Within that framing, Japan's economic success, and its influential resumption of its earlier role as the development model and hub for East Asia, have been important. Japan not only pushed along the Asian Tigers, but also discredited the command economy approach to modernity, serving once again as a model for the Chinese turn to capitalism.

The story of Japan's economic miracle needs no repeating here. Its rapid economic resurgence provided the basis for Japan to resume its role as the economic and developmental core for East Asia. It still led by the example of its developmental state, but now added to this aid, investment, the transfer of technology, and the setting up of regional production chains. After independence, and under US hegemony, South Korea and Taiwan carried on with an authoritarian developmental state that clearly resembled the Japanese colonial system, and laid the foundations for their post-independence rise to wealth and power. Like the other Asian Tigers, South Korea has been very successful at generating wealth and power. Yet the legitimacy of the leaders in the former colonies hinged on the extent to which they fought against the Japanese—which made it an imperative for those who were trained in the Japanese imperial army to insist on discontinuity rather than continuity. Likewise, for politicians and academics alike, speaking of the Japanese developmental legacy remains a risky topic in an age when the legitimacy of the state must be wedded to nationalist stories of development that celebrate the autonomy of the state.

Close links between the South Korean and Taiwanese economies on the one hand, and the Japanese on the other, re-emerged from the wreckage of war. Cumings (1984), argues that as Japan moved away from earlier product cycles such as textiles and heavy industry it transferred these to Taiwan and South Korea, and others in East Asia in the 'flying geese' model of finance and technology transfer. From the 1970s, South Korea's and Taiwan's economic miracles added to the effect of Japan's economic miracle in raising the status of Northeast Asia as the third core of the global capitalist economy. Like Japan, the 'Asian Tigers' (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) followed export-led industrialization, which proved to be as successful for them as it had been for Japan. Enabled both by state-led policies and by

extensive aid and investment from foreign backers, the Asian Tigers tripled their GDP per capita in a little over two decades – by 1988, they accounted for 8.1% of world trade, almost double the share held by the whole of Latin America (Frieden, 2006: 317; Loth, 2014: 134). In South Korea, exports increased at an average rate of 8% per year between 1962-1989; per capita income rose by a factor of 52 during the same period (Zeiler, 2014: 312). A similar, though later, and lesser, story could be told about Japan and the development of Southeast Asian countries.

Once Mao was dead, the success of the Asian Tiger's development influenced Chinese leaders to open up through a combination of export-led industrialization and labour-intensive development (Sugihara, 2013; Wong, 1997). China also followed the Asian Tigers in using Japan's early authoritarian developmental state model to maintain a system of low wages, while keeping both labour organizations and dissent in check. While the postcolonial core-periphery relationship between Japan, and South Korea and Taiwan, was re-established quickly, there was a much longer break between Japan's early assistance to, and inspiration of, Chinese reformers. Between 1937 and 1945, Japan had mainly ruined China, and this was exacerbated by the brutal civil war amongst the Chinese themselves (Paine, 2012: locs. 2370, 4893). During Mao's rule, China tried a different path to development, though even then, from the 1950s to the 1970s, some in the CCP looked upon Japan as a development model (King, 2014).

Once reform and opening up began in China, Japan again began to play a major role in China's development. Deng Xiaoping 'pumped the trickle of Japanese visitors to Beijing for information on how their country's leaders had managed to modernize science, technology, and industry' (Schell and Delury, 2013: 272), and saw Japan as 'a model for China's own economic modernization' (Yahuda, 2014: loc. 2179). Japan made significant contributions via both aid and investment to China's modernization, providing the capital and the industrial technology that China needed for its economic takeoff, and helping Deng to overcome resistance to his market reform and opening up (Yahuda, 2014: locs. 627, 2258; Smith, 2015: 35-6; Kokubun et al., 2017: 95-121). Indeed, as Hagström (2015: 131) argues, by giving so much assistance to China's rapid development from the 1980s onwards, Japan has been complicit in creating the material foundations for the security threat that it increasingly perceives from China. With the escalation since 2010 of the confrontation over the Sankaku/Diaoyu islands, the insulation between economic and political/security relations, has begun to break down.

Japan therefore played a very substantial ideological and economic, and to a lesser extent military, role in the ending of the Cold War. Its alignment with the US, and serving as another exemplary model of the capitalist developmental state, was and is one of the key pillars supporting America's superpower status. Japan's successful development not only put the Soviet Union and its model into the shade, but also facilitated the spread of capitalism throughout Asia.

### Japan and the Transition to a Post-Western World Order?

The next phase of the global structure of wealth and power seems likely to pose significant challenges for Japan. The rise of China puts Japan next door to the second, and potentially first, biggest power in the system, a problem compounded by the intensely anti-Japanese nationalism cultivated by the Chinese government in its patriotic education campaign. Japan's population is shrinking in a world in which big populations are again becoming a key determinant of power. And Japan is at risk of becoming the front line in a US-China rivalry at a time when the US is becoming less reliable as an ally.

So far, Japan's government has sought to adjust by deepening its alliance with the US, and trying to shake off the shackles of its pacifist constitution and become once again a 'normal state' in its relation to military power. It has also begun cultivating security relations with other Asian states that are likewise wary of rising Chinese power. While it has the theoretical options to bandwagon with China or pursue an independent great power status, neither looks attractive, and both require that Japan come to terms with its 'history problem'—that is, over how to write a history of its imperial past that takes into consideration the memories held in the former victim states. China is bent on taking revenge for Japan's role in China's 'century of humiliation', making partnership difficult. The North Korean missile tests render the option of going it alone look dangerous.

The coming decades will be shaped by what happens within and between China and the US. Japan cannot hope for much amelioration of China's hostility to it, even though Sino-Japanese relations are vital to China's desire to have primacy in Asia. Japan now has to consider the security consequences of its economic relationship with China. Like its neighbours in India, Southeast Asia and Australia, it will probably try both to engage with China and hedge against it, playing to increase cooperation amongst themselves and trying to keep the US on their side. But if China plays its hand cleverly by threatening Japan less, and/or the US plays its hand badly by undermining the trust of its allies,

then Japan might have to consider the options of bandwagoning with China or taking an independent stand. In either case, that action would pull the social props from the standing of the US as a global superpower. Despite its relative decline, Japan remains significantly consequential to the global structure of wealth and power.

## Conclusions

The stories we have told above raise the question of why Japan's position and role in the world history of the last 150 years has been so distorted and unbalanced in the study of IR. Why does Japan fade in and out of the IR stories? Once the filters of Eurocentrism and realism are stripped away, several explanations seem to bear:

1. Both racism, initially explicit, but latterly implicit, and Eurocentrism, seem to account for the difficulty in acknowledging that Japan was part of the first round of modernity. As Edward Said put it, Orientalism = Eurocentrism (1993). In Orientalist discourse the Orient is presumed to be 'stagnant'. This necessarily makes Japan, which geographically is in the Orient, an anomaly in the Orientalist/Eurocentric imagining of historical development.
2. Being overshadowed by its catastrophic behavior during the 1930s and 40s, and IR's forgetting of the link between internationalism and imperialism, seem to account for IR's neglect of Japan's role as a normal great power during the interwar period. This, plus the subordination of IPE to realism, explains the neglect of Japan's importance as the development model and hub for Northeast Asia, and the importance of this to the outcome of the Cold War. The post-1945 consensus that development is a universal good to be aspired to, ironically splits the assessment of Japanese colonialism, and its developmental contribution, between complete denial or affirmation. To paraphrase Escobar (2012), Japan's history since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Asian outpost of modernity, and the developmental hub for East Asia, has unsettled and politicized the meaning of development and its role in the making and unmaking of East Asia.
3. Four explanations working in synergy seem to account for Japan's marginalization in the story of the Cold War and after. One is the strength of neorealism, especially polarity theory, in IR thinking, which, because of its emphasis on military power and autonomous foreign policy, discounts Japan. A second is US-centrism in IR, which is inclined to see Japan and Europe as being more dependent on US superpower than constitutive of it. A third is the general discounting of economic power in most mainstream IR thinking, and the particular failure to connect Japan's position in the first rise of modernity, and its role as an early development model and hub for Northeast Asia, to its crucial role in

the rise of a capitalist East Asia that is now becoming the central fact of world politics. A fourth is Japan's divided view of itself and its history (Dudden, 2008), which means that Japan has hardly registered in the rest of the world in telling its own story.

Emphasising some parts of Japan's story while suppressing, forgetting, or marginalizing others, produces an unbalanced and distorted picture of how this important country has both fitted into, and shaped, the global structure of wealth, power and ideology since the Meiji restoration. In academic terms, this is both wrong in itself, and complicit in maintaining excessively Eurocentric and realist understandings of world politics. In practical terms, it provides a poor foundation for academics and policy-makers to understand the history and dynamics of both Asia, and the international system/society as a whole over the past century and a half. As we move out of the era of Western dominance, it is more than past time that Japan's full story as the first non-Western modern great power be given the prominence and balance it deserves. On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, rethinking Japan, points to a deeper need to rethink the Western biases of IR theory and the potential (or not) for non-Western approaches to give a clearer picture.

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